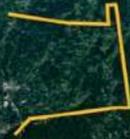


# Dutchess County Equality Trails



Mid Hudson  
Antislavery History Project  
Slavery, Antislavery, and the Underground Railroad

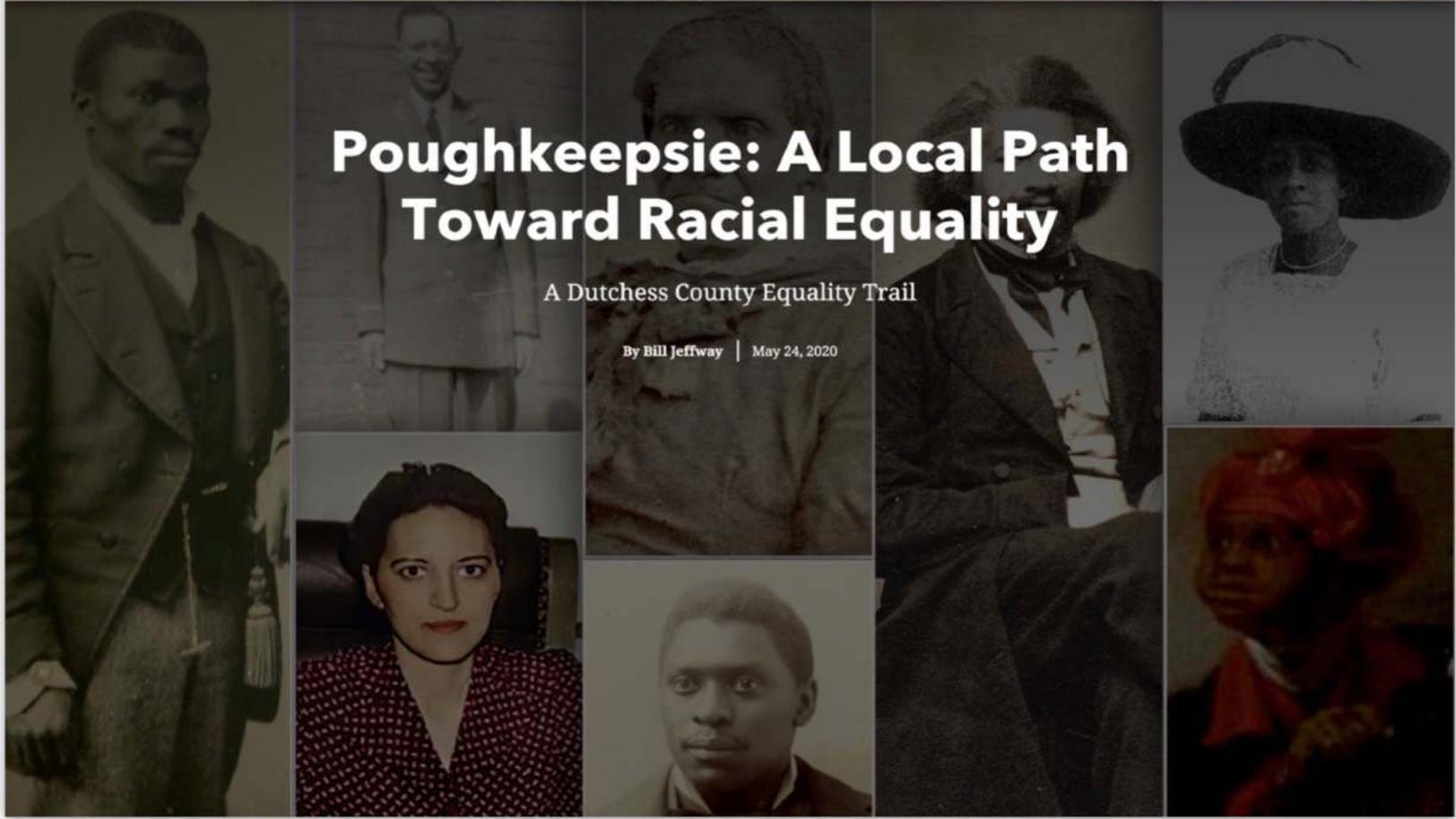


Dutchess County  
Historical Society

## Poughkeepsie: A Local Path Toward Racial Equality

A Dutchess County Equality Trail

By Bill Jeffway | May 24, 2020



## **A Local Path Toward Racial Equality: Poughkeepsie**

We hope you'll meet people, and see places, that illuminate the path that led to a US constitutional promise of equality after the Civil War, and the ongoing effort to realize that promise. This is the story of individuals, regularly suffering under extreme prejudice, determined to pursue life, liberty and happiness regardless of the stark limitations put on them. Many of the stories of Black Americans prior to the Civil War come to us from the Mid-Hudson Antislavery History Project, which has researched the history of slavery, antislavery and the Underground Railroad in Dutchess County and the surrounding region. And from the research, publications and collections of the Dutchess County Historical Society.

In September of 1926, the historian and philosopher, Louis Mumford, spoke at the Amenia estate of Joel and Amy Spingarn, 20 miles northeast of Poughkeepsie. The Spingarns were active in the creation of the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) in the early 20th century. Troutbeck was the site of important foundational NAACP conferences as Joel Spingarn was variously Board Chairman, Treasurer, and President of the organization..

*The things that we can see and touch awaken the imagination, Mumford said. Local history touches off these things that have happened on the spot; and the facts of local history become parts of a person's own life to an extent which is rare with scenes and incidents one has taken solely out of books and secondhand accounts.*

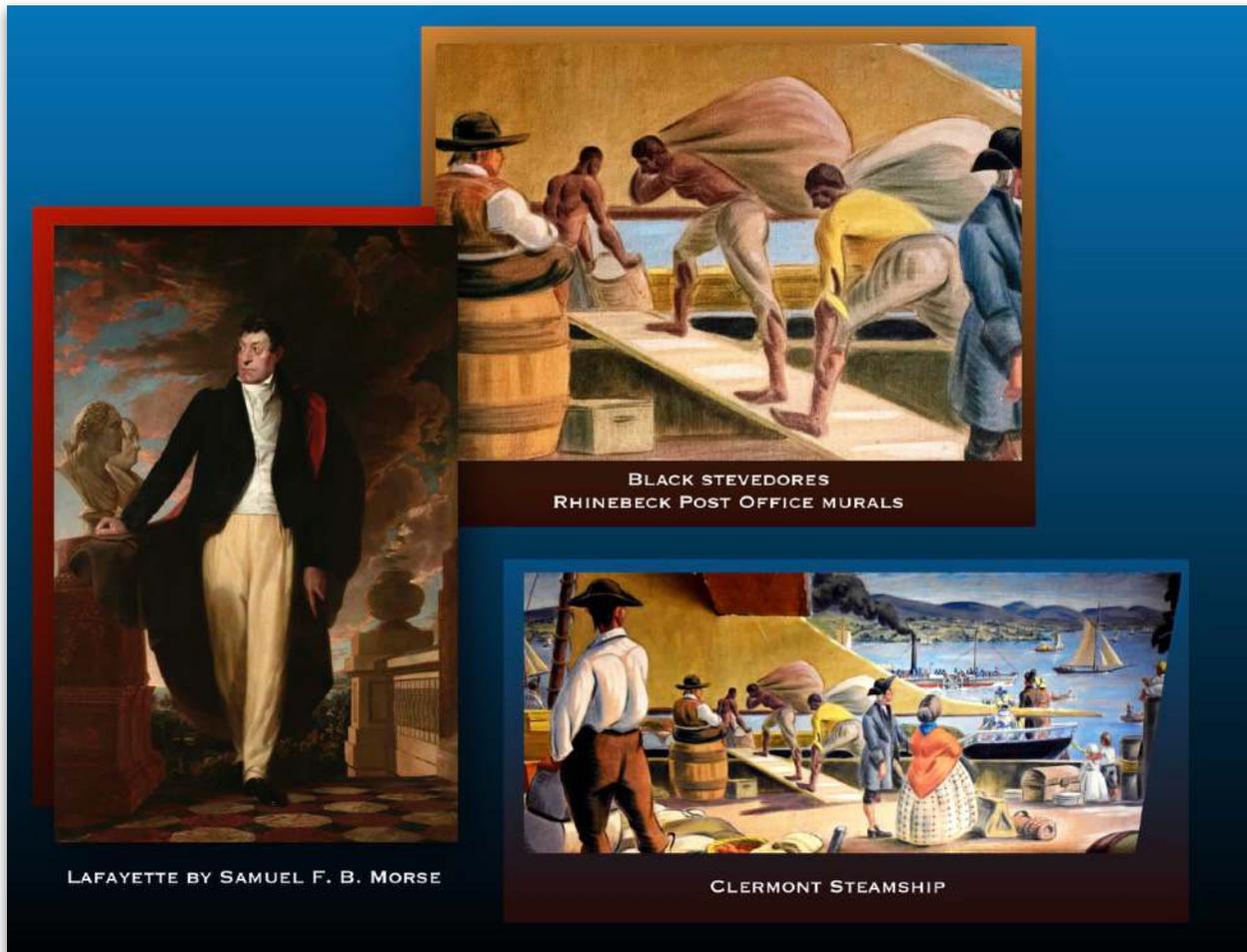
That is the spirit of this exercise.

The story of slavery in Dutchess County shows a pervasive practice across rural Dutchess and in built-up river towns like Fishkill (now Beacon), Rhinebeck, Red Hook and Poughkeepsie. Slavery was abolished in New York State in 1827. Constitutional amendments after the Civil War technically "settled" the matter of the *promise* of equality for those with African heritage and other persons of color. We have yet to realize the full blossoming of that promise.

The trail starts on the banks of the Hudson River, where the paradox of slavery in a country promising equality and liberty can readily be seen.

*This is a printed version of an online tour so there will be some incongruities*

## 1 Cross currents & contradictions



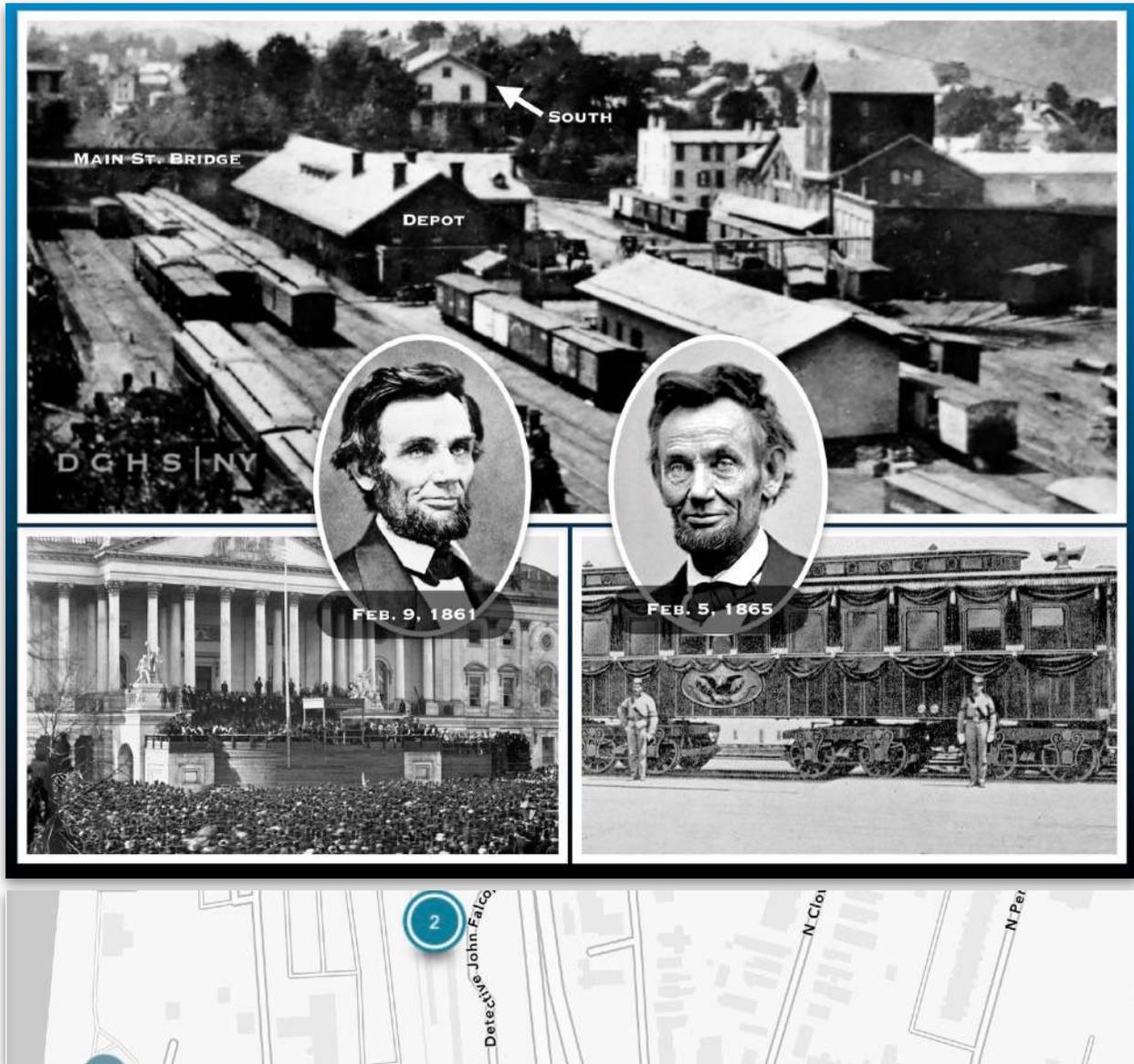
Here at water's edge, just before dawn on September 16, 1824, imagine the feeling of anticipation for the arrival of the Marquis de Lafayette (portrait shown) and his son Georges Washington Lafayette. The 5,000 inhabitants of Poughkeepsie, as well as many in the rural areas, knew for months that the national hero was coming from France to the US for a national tour with the highest honors. And that Poughkeepsie was one of the few stops. Anticipation was especially high given several last minute delays in his actual arrival date. Huge bonfires were kept burning along the river by throngs of young boys given the task. Cannons on Kraal Rock were sounded to salute the guest and notify residents that the ship approached in the darkness.

The Marquis de Lafayette was only 19 when he caught the attention of General George Washington and served the Revolutionary cause with distinction, bringing the essential support of France to bear. The Frenchman was 67 years old when, at daybreak, he stepped off his boat and was taken by carriage up Main, to Academy, then Cannon and Market Streets. He was honored with breakfast for several hours at the Poughkeepsie Hotel at Main and Market Streets.

At the same time, on this spot, and others like it such as Upper Landing just north, enslaved individuals would have endured the hard, physical labor of loading and unloading ships. *Stevedores* are depicted here in the murals of the Rhinebeck Post Office. Created by Olin Dows for a 1930s WPA project, they show what could be a typical, busy day on any Hudson Valley river town in the early 19th century. The Clermont, shown in the mural, launched the steamship industry in 1807. The Erie Canal opened in 1825, further accelerating the river economy. All before slavery was abolished in NY State July 4, 1827.

This kind of fundamental contradiction, the celebration of liberty and equality while enslaved individuals toiled as property, is embodied on this spot. The portrait shown of Lafayette was painted by Samuel F. B. Morse. While Morse would come to be known for his invention of Morse Code in 1844, and would establish a summer home in Poughkeepsie in 1847, at the time of Lafayette's arrival in 1824 he was highly regarded as a painter. Morse won the commission to create the official portrait of Lafayette shown. And yet, Morse was a fierce defender of slavery, calling slavery right and moral. He also harbored great antipathy toward "Papists" and saw all Catholics as a threat.

## 2 The cost of freedom



On the site of the current train station, twice in just over four years, thousands gathered in recognition of Abraham Lincoln. Like bookends to the period of our nation's deadliest war and deepest conflict, one gathering marked the beginning of Abraham Lincoln's Presidency, and the other marked the tragic and early end.

**Tuesday, February 19, 1861** President-elect Lincoln made a brief stop, and [said a few words](#), on his way to the inauguration in Washington. It was on this trip, considered to be the invention of the [whistle-stop political tour](#), that he started sprouting the whiskers that would become his famous beard. Equally new and iconic, Mrs. Lincoln had their Black servant, William, buy his famous tall hat a

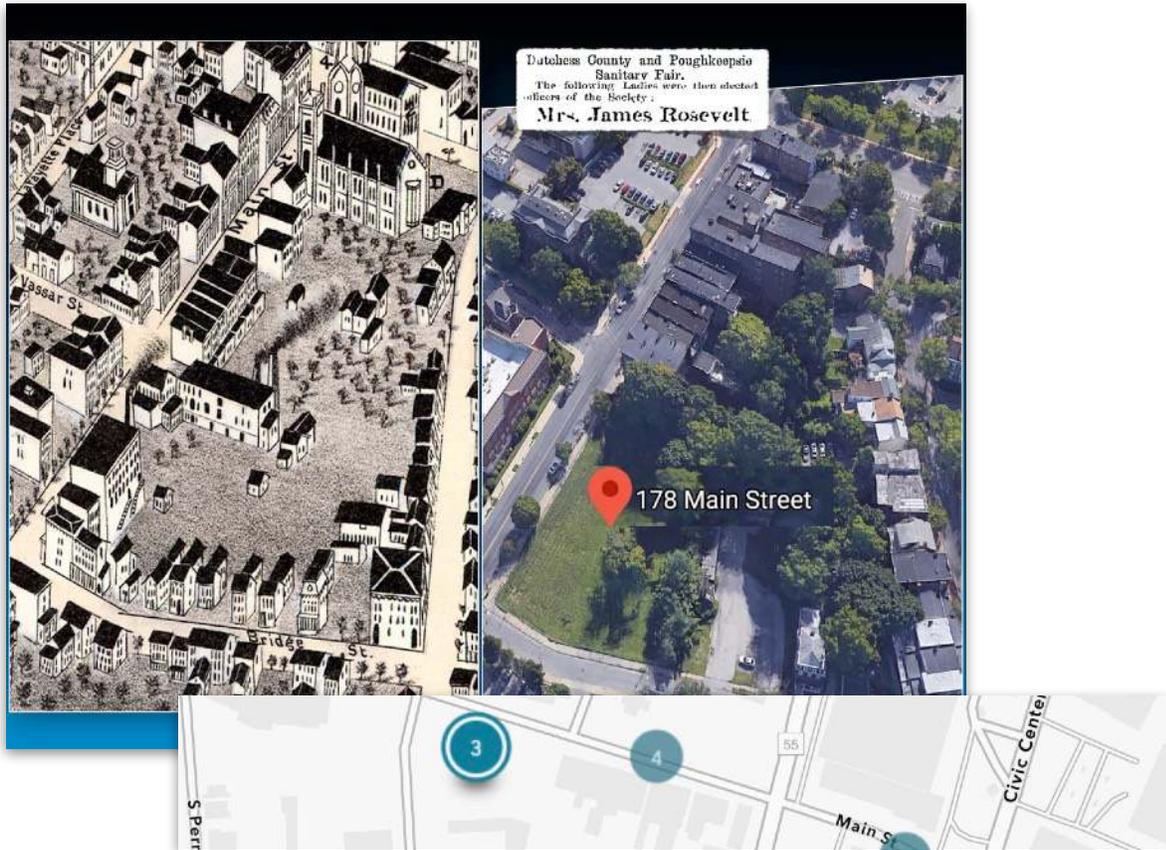
few days earlier near Utica. Shown is the photo that was taken at the start of the trip, ten days prior to his Poughkeepsie arrival.

**Tuesday, April 26, 1865.** The funeral train carrying the remains of the assassinated President , and those of his son, Willie, stopped at Poughkeepsie Depot while thousands gathered. Matthew Vassar cut a branch from his magnolia tree and placed it in the funeral car. The tree still stands today!

The cost of exchanging slavery for equality in the US Constitution was high. The Civil War cost the lives of 750,000 individuals, and the life of President Lincoln. In addition to the Emancipation Proclamation, or 13th Constitutional Amendment in Lincoln's lifetime, the 14th and 15th Amendments in 1868 and 1870 respectively, were required to establish the promise of equality.

## 3

## 1864 Sanitary Fair

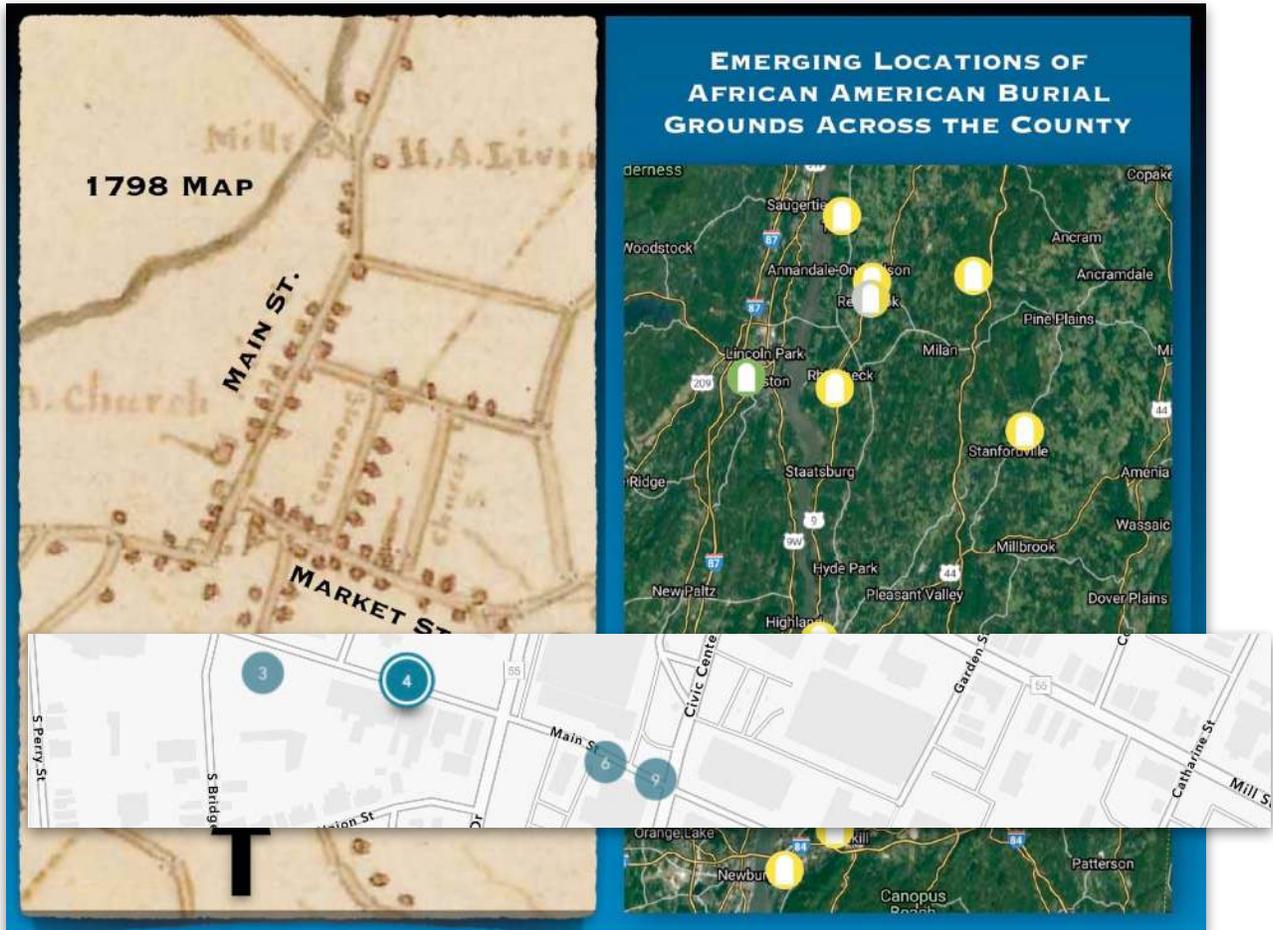


On this spot, at 178 Main Street, we find the site of Poughkeepsie's 1864 *Sanitary Fair*, which raised \$18,641 (the equivalent of \$250,000 today) for support of Union troops, hospital and medical supplies, and veterans. The event was held in an unused carriage factory owned by Matthew Vassar who lived close-by.

A newspaper clipping from the time (shown), states that among the prominent and wealthy ladies involved in the fair was Mrs. James Roosevelt, who would have attended in her role as a manager. She was Rebecca Howland Roosevelt and was involved in a number of local patriotic efforts, such as fundraising for the purchase of Washington's Mount Vernon. When she died in 1876 at the family's nearby estate in Hyde Park, her husband remarried in 1880. In 1882, James and Sarah Delano Roosevelt became the proud parents of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. You know the rest of that story!

The Roosevelt name would become famous enough that newspapers would learn how to spell it correctly!

## 4 Burial ground of slaves

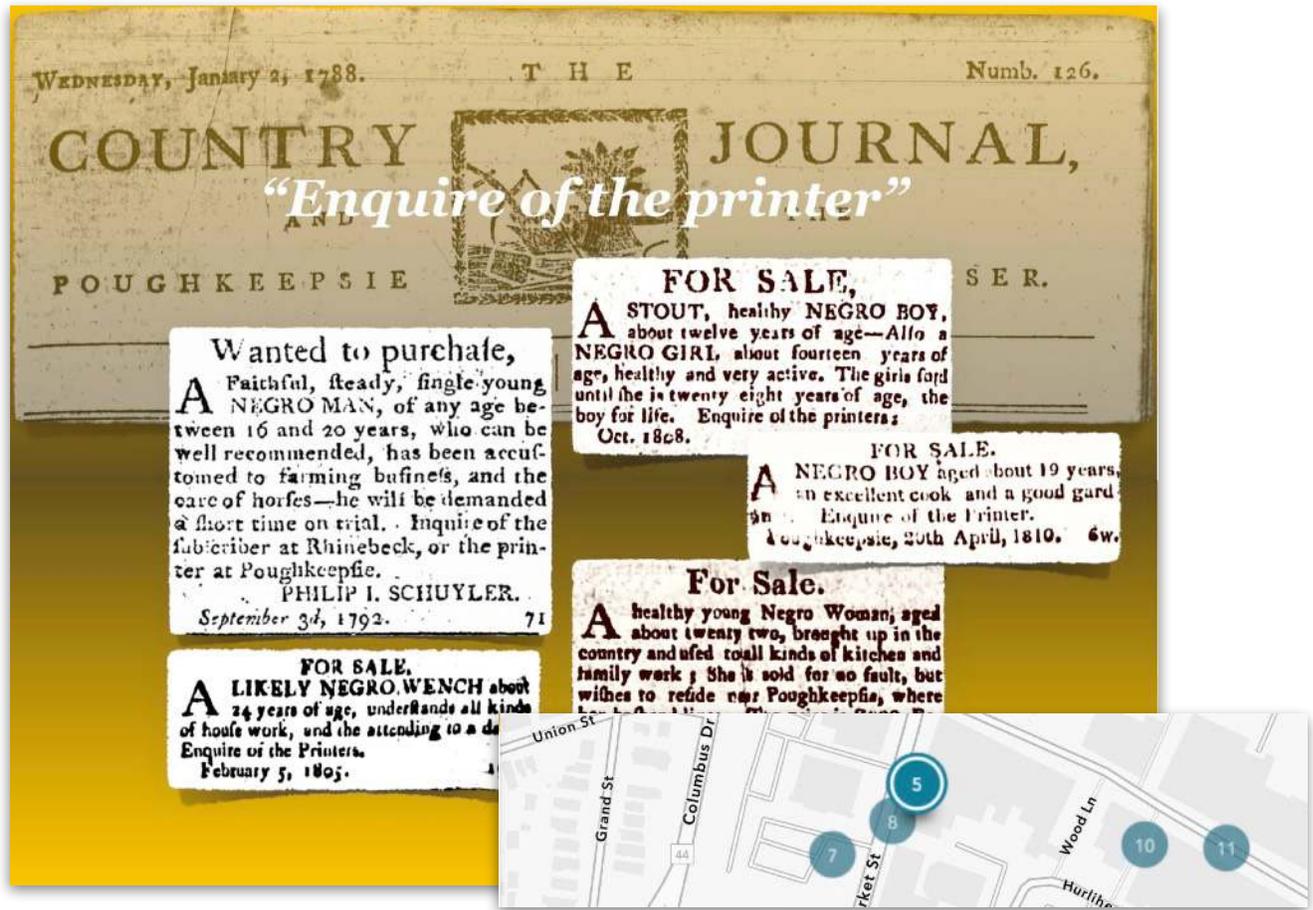


Historically, whether free or slave, [Persons of Color were buried separately](#) from Whites, a practice which lasted in certain places in Dutchess County until the 1920s . Given the negligence in keeping records and the frequent prohibition of permanent memorials like headstones, the rediscovery of these sacred places is challenging.

An [1870 Poughkeepsie newspaper account](#) quotes an older resident as saying, upon discovery of multiple coffins and human remains while digging at this spot, that this was a “Negro burial ground” created by a slave owner “near the vicinity” between 1800 and 1810.

We publish an evolving documentation of [African American and Slave burial grounds](#). We know there were thousands of enslaved individuals in the county over multiple generations, and we are only just beginning to understand where they may rest.

**5** The buying & selling of slaves

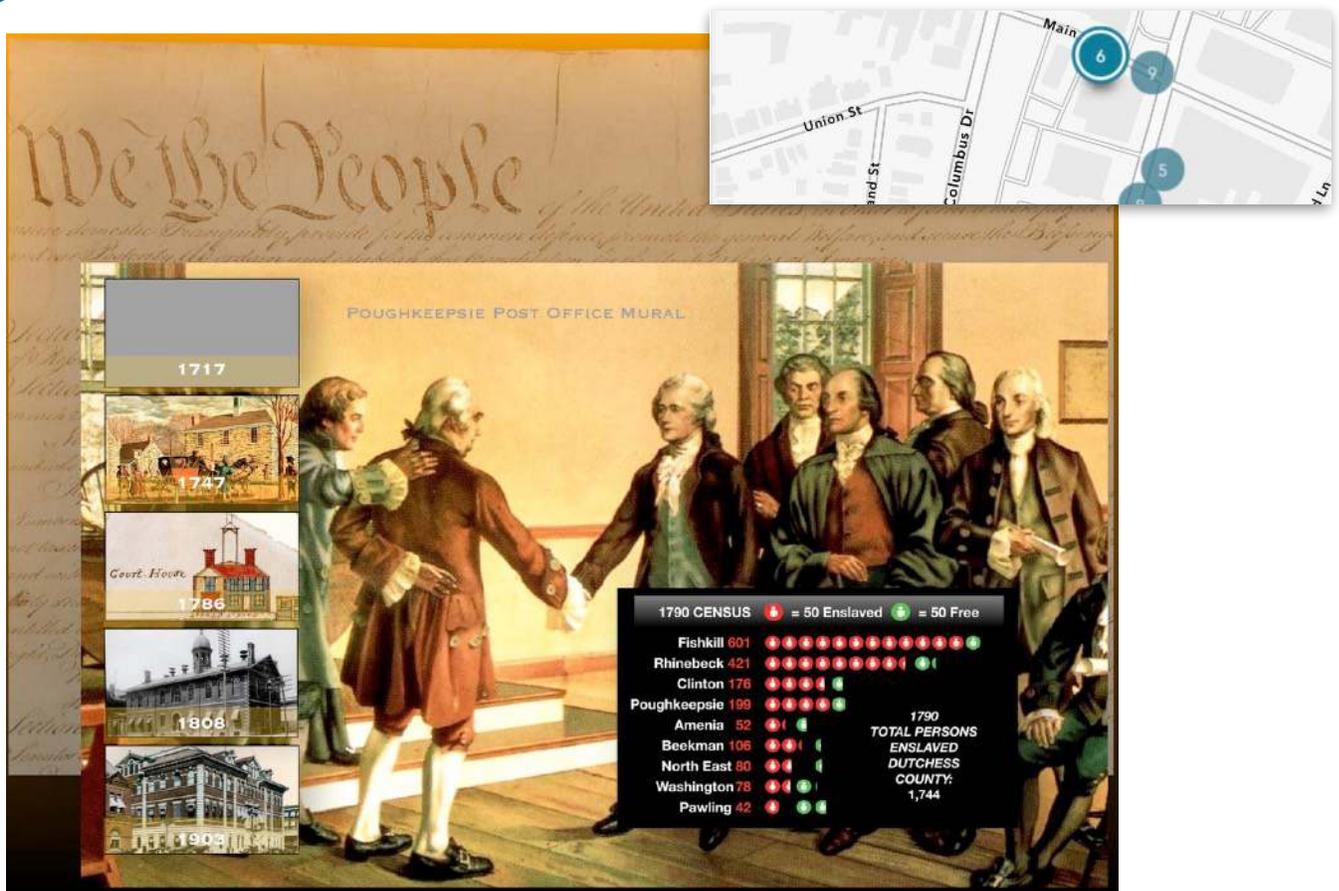


In *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, Edgar J. McManus writes, "Newspapers depended upon [the slave trade] for much of their advertising revenue. To promote the trade, the newspapers provided slaveholders with special services free of charge. Most papers maintained lists of slaves being offered or sought for sale."

We have no proof of any slave market in Dutchess County of the kind that existed on Wall Street until 1762. McManus explains the demise of the Wall Street marketplace as coming from an over-abundance of slave labor, shifting the focus from an importation of enslaved individuals, to an economy of conducting sales within the US, largely owner to owner, often through newspapers as is so evident in Dutchess County.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, the main Poughkeepsie newspaper was located just south of Main St. on the east side of Market, then just east of Market St. on the south side of Main.

## 6 A US Constitution with a "3/5th" compromise



In July of 1788, in what was the third of what would be five court houses on this site (see image) New York held its US Constitutional Convention. New York voted to join the United States, but in the closest vote of any ratifying State.

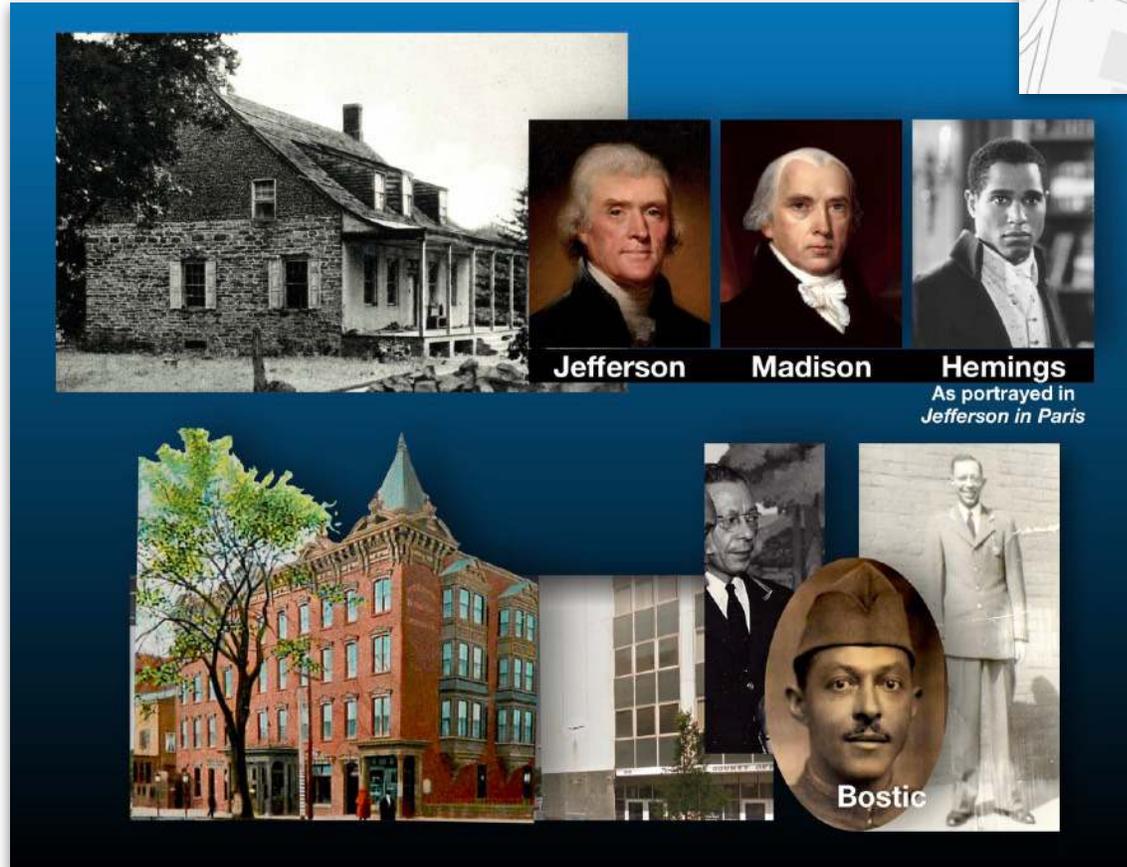
The divisive issue was the balance between Federal and State rights. Shown is the 1938 Poughkeepsie Post Office mural, a WPA project overseen closely by FDR.

On the left, Gov. George Clinton who was advocating stronger States' rights, shakes hands with Alexander Hamilton, who led the Federalist argument. Resistance from State's rights advocates like Clinton are responsible for the Bill of Rights, the first Constitutional Amendments which addressed in the first Congress, a contingency of the compromise of 1788.

In a move that literally quantified inequality, the original US Constitution established that persons who were not free would be counted as 3/5th of a person to determine Congressional representation. Thirty-nine years before New York State abolished slavery, this was and a time when New York and Dutchess County had many slaves.

Isaac Roosevelt, ancestor to two Presidents and a first lady (Franklin Delano, Eleanor, and Theodore Roosevelt) is fourth to the right of Hamilton. The 1790 Dutchess County Census showed that 1,744 Persons of Color were slaves, and a small number free.

## 7 Jefferson's slave James Hemings on Market Street



In the 18th century, Hendrickson's Tavern was a gathering place for politicians and lawyers as it was a few doors south of the Courthouse, with Poughkeepsie mid-way between New York City and Albany.

When Thomas Jefferson and James Madison went on what they called a "[botanical tour](#)" in May of 1791 (and others called a political tour), they sent Jefferson's slave, James Hemings up to Poughkeepsie from New York City with horses and carriage. The two tourists arrived later by boat and the three would start their ground journey on the morning of May 23. Jefferson made notes that morning about white pine trees and juniper shrubs "with berries for infusing gin."

James Hemings was the child of Jefferson's white father-in-law and one of his slaves. James was half-sister to the better known, Sally Hemings, the slave with whom Jefferson had children. James Hemings was an accomplished *chef de cuisine* trained in Paris.

The building shown here is actually the Brinkerhoff house elsewhere because there are numerous references to the similarity of the two buildings. Here slept the author of the Declaration of Independence, who immortalized the words that "*all men are created equal*" as a self-evident truth. If Hemings was allowed to sleep on the site, it would have been in the basement or attic.

The Episcopal Bishop, the Rev. Philander Chase, who was Rector of Poughkeepsie's Christ Church at the time in the late 18th and early 19th century, told the story of [Alexander Hamilton's profession of faith](#) at Hendrickson's. Hamilton's Christian faith, or the degree of it, was a constant source of speculation.

The site continued to be a highly respected place for travelers until the 1960s. The Nelson House (image superimposed on its location just south of what is today the County Government building) was a long-term employer to African Americans like Sebie Bostic, shown in service in WWI, and as an employee of Nelson House.

## 8 The father of our country & his body servant

It is reported that George Washington was a frequent visitor to Poughkeepsie. There is one occasion, in particular, that is memorialized.

On December 27, 1783, Washington visited the Masonic Lodge in Poughkeepsie, located at the home of Louis Dubois on Market Street, on the site of the Bardavon theater (see the Masonic commemorative coin from a century after the visit).

We are not sure whether Washington was traveling with his personal valet, Billy Lee (shown in portrait with Washington). But Lee, given he was in this trusted role for decades, tended to always be with Washington. So it is probable that Lee was at one time, or another, a guest in Poughkeepsie.

GENERAL WASHINGTON'S NEGRO BODY-SERVANT.  
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

THE stirring part of this celebrated colored man's life properly began with his death—that is to say, the notable features of his biography begin with the first time he died. He had been little heard of up to that time, but since then we have never ceased to hear of him; we have never ceased to hear of him at stated, un-failing intervals. His was a most remarkable career, and I have thought that its history would make a valuable addition to our biographical literature. Therefore, I have carefully collated the materials for such a work, from authentic sources, and here present them to the public. I have rigidly excluded from these pages everything of a doubtful character, with the object in view of introducing my work into the selection.

**Washington's Man Is Buried Here**  
RHINEBECK GAZETTE

**Andrew Frazier Body Servant of George Washington Has Grave In Village**

There is located near the old gates at the west of the cemetery, a grave which should be of interest especially this year in which the nation seeks to honor the memory of George Washington. It is that of Andrew Frazier, a body servant of Washington. In seeking to obtain data on his war record, Mrs. Theodore de Laporte wrote the Veterans' Administration at Washington and received the following letter in reply:

hours of his dissolution he was in full possession of all his distinctly recollect the second installation of Was'ington, al, the surrender of Cornwallis, the battle of Trenton, the



Lee was the only slave that Washington freed upon his death, keeping the others enslaved until the death of his wife. The location of Lee's grave is not known, but is assumed to be in a large unmarked grave for slaves at Mount Vernon. The fact that the grave of even this highly regarded individual is unknown, is unfortunately not surprising for the time.

The absence of understanding the location of Lee's burial is profoundly ironic. By the 1860s, the point at which only the oldest of individuals could have been living at the time of the Revolutionary War, a great many older Black men were identified (it appears identified by White people) as the body servant of Washington. The motivation for doing so would make a good research paper or study in the classroom.

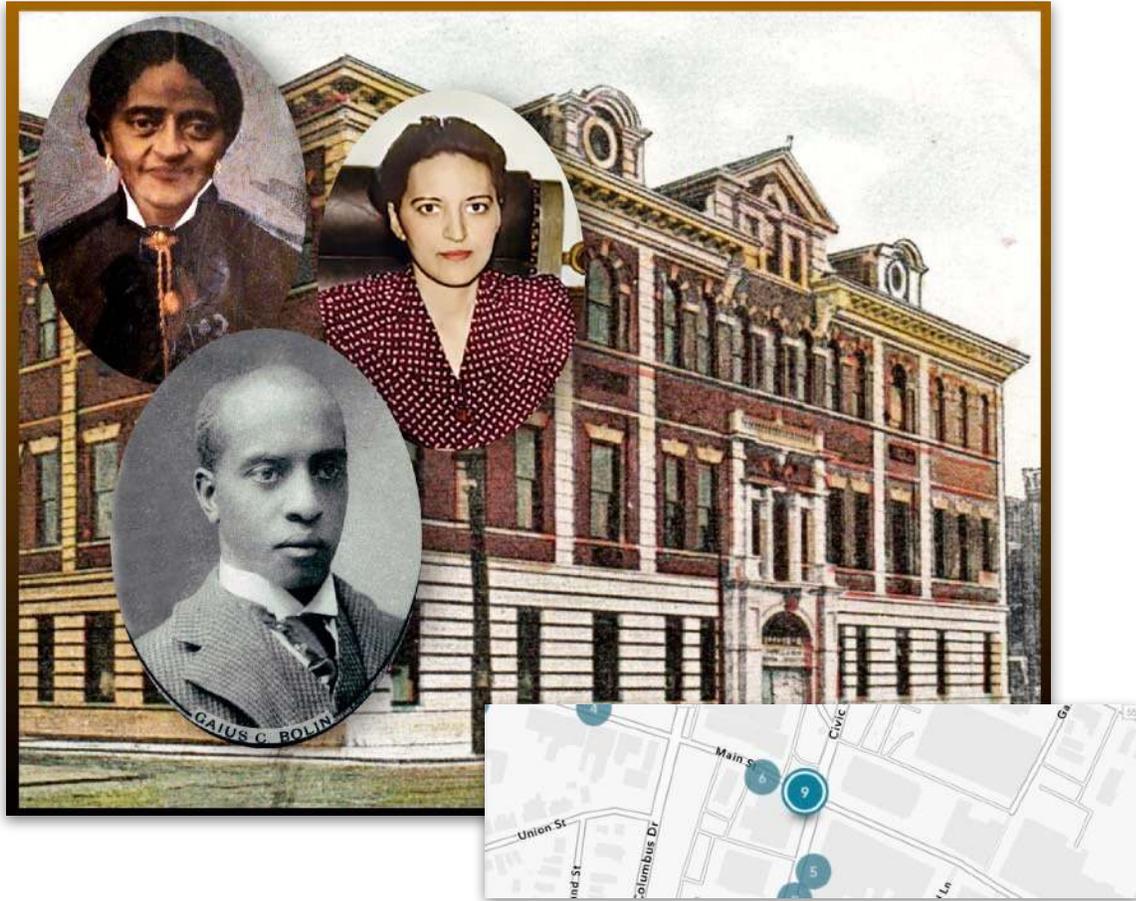
In 1868, Mark Twain wrote a parody called "[George Washington's Negro Body Servant](#)" in reference to the vast number of such claims.

We know these stories persisted locally and as late as 1932, on the 200th anniversary of Washington's birth. It was announced in local newspapers that Washington's body servant, Andrew Frazier, was buried in Rhinebeck, 15 miles north of Poughkeepsie (see news clipping).

We know this is not true. The Black patriot veteran buried there, Andrew Frazier, was at one time body servant to Col. Morris Graham in the Revolutionary War. Frazier wrote in pension applications that he once had *seen* Washington, but that was the extent of it.

In any case, all we know for sure is that Washington came to Poughkeepsie, in the instance described and many others. And no doubt, so did Billy Lee. The real, the one, the only body servant of Washington.

## 9 Gaius Bolin (1864 - 1946)

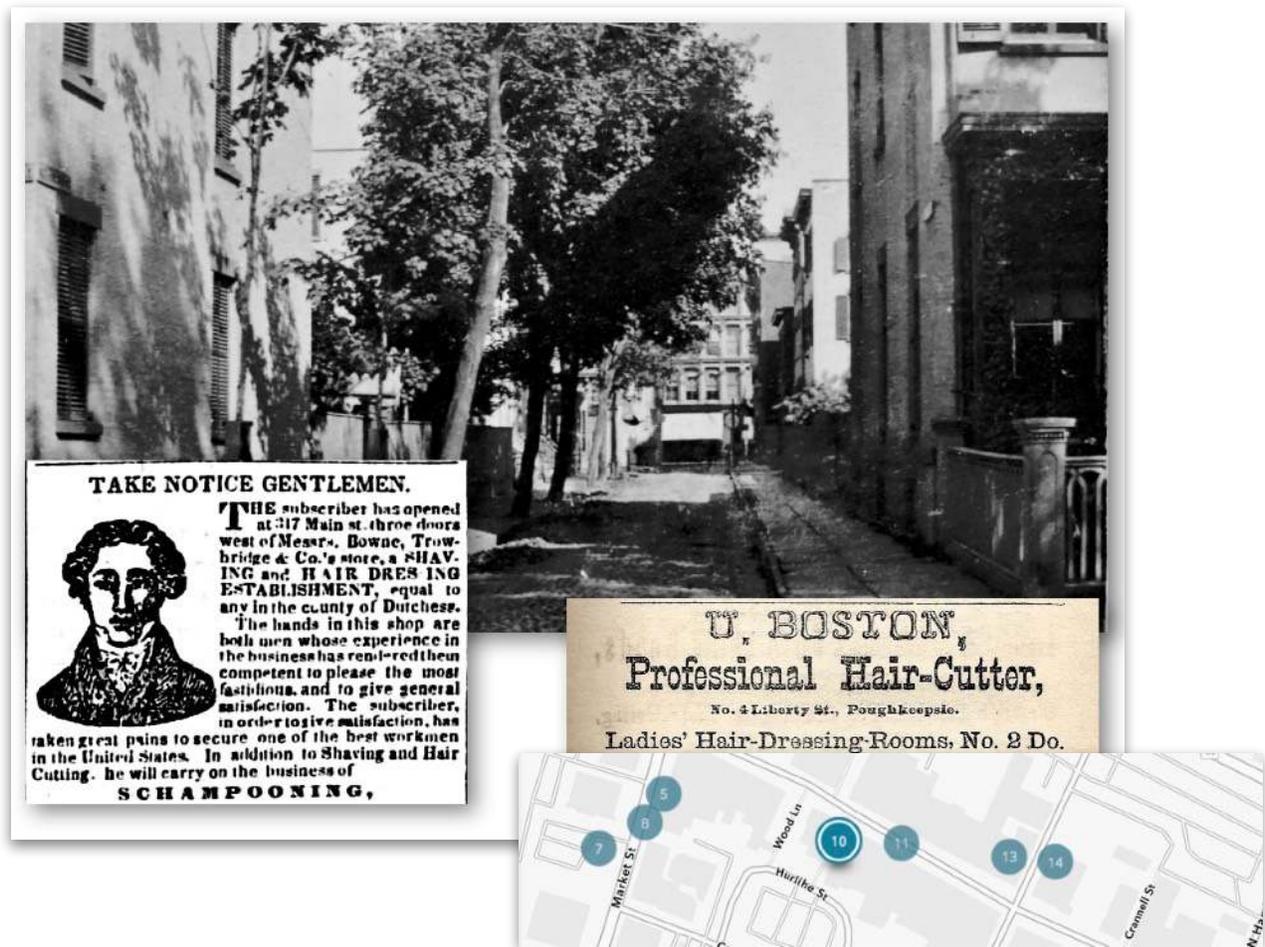


Gaius Bolin passed the NY Bar in 1892 and would have been early in his practice when this courthouse was built in 1902. He became the first Black lawyer in the County. He was the first Black graduate of Williams College.

Bolin's father, Abraham, was born in Dover Plains in 1826, a year before slavery was abolished in New York State. Abraham Bolin later moved to Poughkeepsie with his wife, Ann (top left photo). They raised seven children. Gaius Bolin's daughter, Jane Bolin (shown), became the first African American Judge in the US in 1939.

The photo shown of Gaius Bolin is from the photograph of the many heads of Dutchess County Bar Association, on the walls of the Courthouse.

## 10 Uriah Boston, Barber, Abolitionist

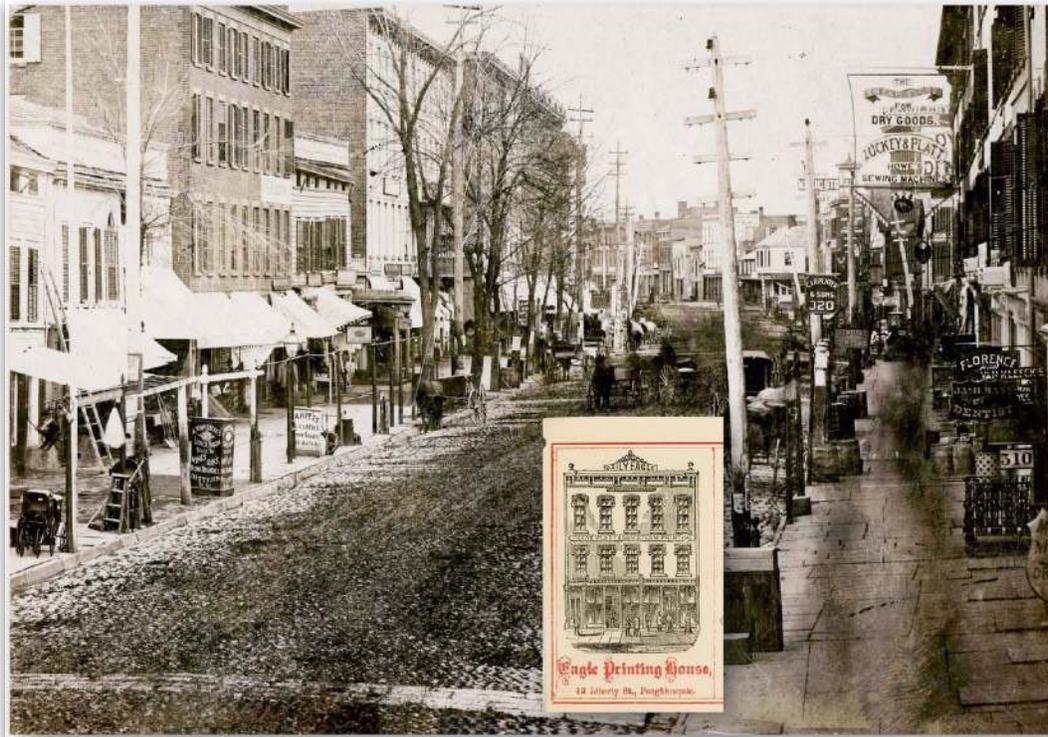


**4 Liberty Street, corner of Liberty and Main:** there were various sites of the barbershop of African American civic leader and abolitionist Uriah Boston between 1844 and 1870. Boston was a highly visible abolitionist figure. His first barbershop, earlier on, was at 12 Garden Street, other locations included 254, 286, 292, and 317 Main St.

He got into a very public back-and-forth with Frederick Douglass when Boston felt Douglass was demeaning barbers by saying that Blacks needed to get more professional training and move into more professional jobs, and avoid the traditional roles allocated to them.

Boston was very active in the abolition movement. Unusual for the time, Boston sent a son to New York Central College at a time when that school had three Black professors.

## 11 Poughkeepsie Eagle



310 Main Street. On this spot were the offices of Poughkeepsie Eagle. Owned by the Platt family (more on Edmund Platt later), it was the first newspaper sympathetic to the antislavery cause. It later merged with the Journal. This photo is dated 1868, looking east from 310 Main.

In 1919, Gaius Bolin wrote a [scathing letter to the editor](#) that was highly critical of a *Poughkeepsie Eagle News* editorial relating to the race riots of that summer. Bolin had this supportive description of the newspaper's prior leadership in the 19th century, saying it was at that time, "...newspaper that the broad-minded, fearless stalwart John I Platt edited for so many years with such signal ability and success, and which under the guidance of his powerful mind and pen did such yeoman service in this Hudson River Valley prior to and during the Civil War, and in the settlement of the national questions in the reconstruction period after the war and up to the very time of his lamented death."

**12** Universalist Church hosted progressive advocates of abolition and women's equality



The Universalist Church on Cannon St. served as a venue for talks and concerts from before the Civil War. Among the early speakers were these individuals:

**Frederick Douglass.** From the diary of Edmund Platt, mentioned earlier, in attendance at Universalist Church lecture **Tuesday, January 12, 1858**. In the evening I went to hear a lecture by Frederick Douglass, it was very good. He used to be a slave. He told how he learned to read and write and [do math]. In the first place he was given to a boy named Tomas Hall who was kind to him, and when Tom's mother [taught Tom] his letters, she forgot to put Fred out of the room. Until

by and by, he knew all the letters , he learned to spell and read a little. He then went into the shipyard, and when the carpenters wrote on the timbers, he asked what that meant and they told him. And pretty soon he could write the letters in those words himself. Then on the street corners, he told the white boys he could write. He made a few letters. And as they wanted to show their skill, they wrote down the whole alphabet so he had a copy. He learned by picking up a little at a time. And at last he ran away and has not been back since. Diary, DCHS Collections.

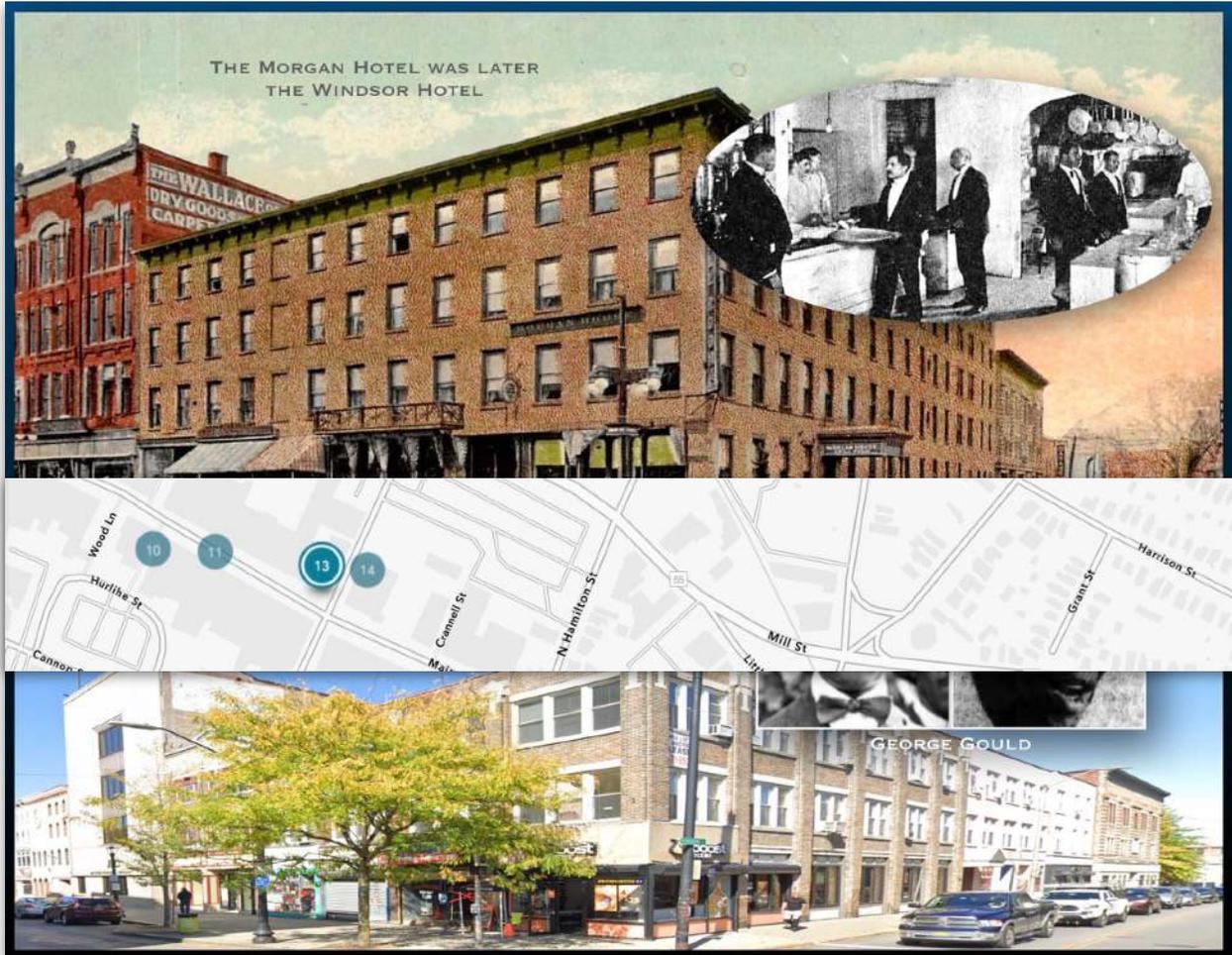
**Susan B. Anthony** spoke here in the 1850s when the abolitionist and women's equality movement were closely tied.

**Ernestine Rose** spoke in 1853 on women's rights and many times subsequent to that. From the Jewish Women's Archive: In the 1840s and 1850s, when antislavery and women's struggles overlapped, she worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Paulina Wright, Sojourner Truth, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. After the Civil War, some political strategists urged that women delay their quest for the vote and focus on the rights of African Americans, but Rose consistently maintained that the struggles be conjoined, stating "emancipation from every kind of human bondage is my principle."

**Charles A. Dana** used this role as the proprietor and editor of the NY Tribune to advance the anti-slavery cause.

**John P. Hale** was a congressman then US Senator described as the first outspoken anti-slavery US Senator.

## 13 Gregory House

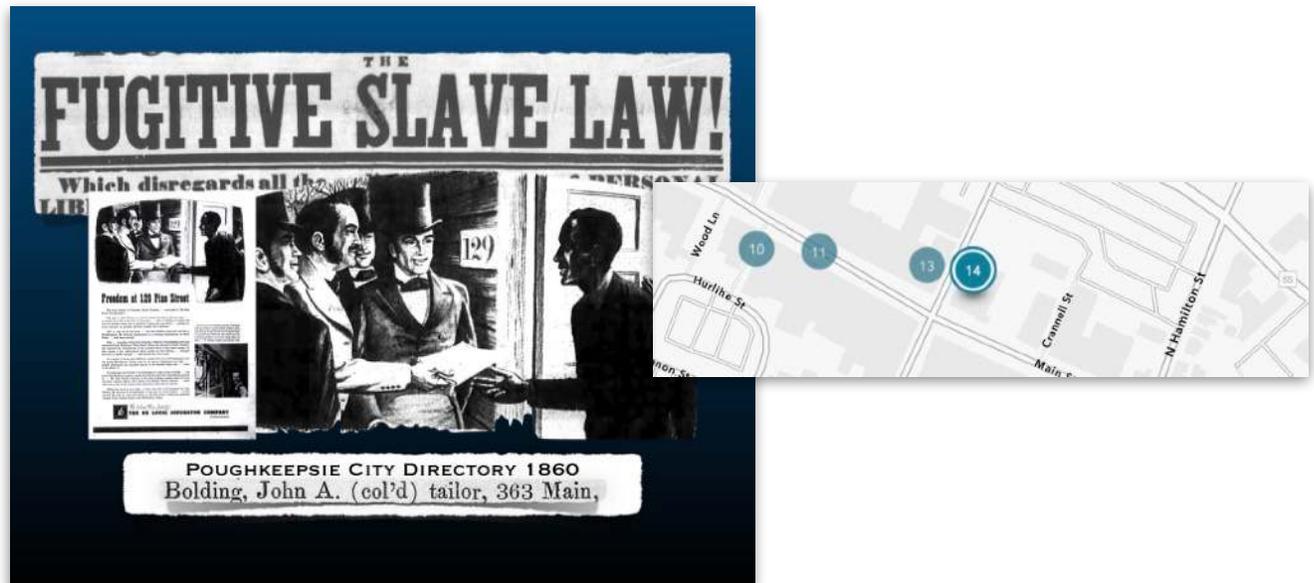


341 Main Street. Site of the Gregory House, a renowned temperance hotel owned by local abolitionist and reformer Theodorus Gregory.

The site became the site of the highly regarded Morgan House. A turn of the century promotional card shows African Americans as waiters and servers in the restaurant.

World War One veteran George Gould (profiled later) was a bellhop when the Hotel was known as the Windsor Hotel.

## 14 John Bolding, fugitive slave



Although New York State had abolished slavery 24 years earlier, a Poughkeepsie tailor named John Bolding was covertly taken into custody and jailed.

When Abraham Lincoln famously commented in 1858 that "a house divided cannot stand," and that the US would have to become all slave or all free, it was this kind of conflict he was thinking of.

It was on this spot in 1851 that Federal Agents swooped in and with precise timing hurried John Bolding off in a shuttered carriage to arrive at the Poughkeepsie train depot just minutes before the scheduled train was to depart.

The covert nature of the action reflected the tension that the Fugitive Slave Law was creating between free and slave states.

The shop of the formerly enslaved tailor John Bolding, from which he was taken by U.S. Marshalls in 1851 in a famous case under the Fugitive Slave Act, was near Gregory House. The DCHS 1926 Yearbook published [the story of John Bolding](#). In a highly idealized and historically inaccurate ad from 1953 for Poughkeepsie's De Laval Separator Company, Bolding is shown receiving his freedom at his home at 129 Pine Street (house is no longer standing) when actually he had been remanded to jail in the South under the harshest conditions.

## 15 Sadie Peterson



[Sadie Peterson Delaney](#) and her parents moved to Poughkeepsie when she was a child. She attended Poughkeepsie High School.

She became a nationally known leader in bibliotherapy, profiled and lauded by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for her work at Tuskegee Veterans Administration Hospital.

In 1914, a year before New York had its first, and unsuccessful referendum on women's suffrage, at a meeting of suffragists at AME Zion Church, Peterson read a poem. She was, at the time, known for very powerful writing.

In the building that was the Poughkeepsie High School at the time, now the Family Partnership building on North Hamilton Street, there is a room where she may have attended classes, today you can find the Sadie Peterson Delaney African Roots Library.

## 16 Smith AME Zion Church

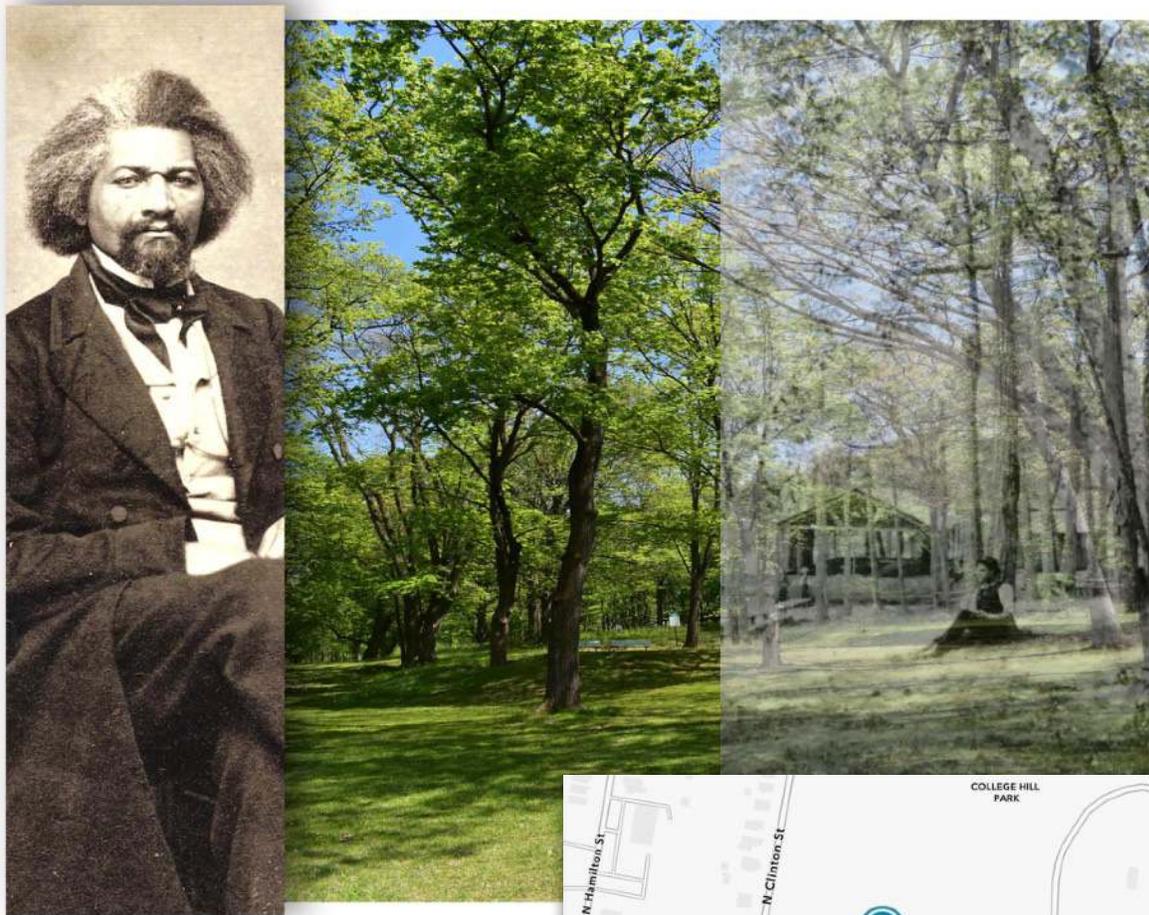


Under the leadership of Walter Patrice, the Church building became listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

World War One veteran Clarence Anderson (profiled later) wrote about the Church history. That and other items can be found at [www.dchsny.org/amezion](http://www.dchsny.org/amezion).

The photograph of the children is from the Walter Patrice Collection at DCHS. Also shown, a contemporary photograph of a regular Sunday service.

## 17 Emancipation Day Celebration



Frederick Douglass attends Emancipation Day celebration with 4,000 people 1858 “*Emancipation Day*” was the name of the holiday recognizing August 1, 1834, as the date that the British Slavery Emancipation Act began the graduated process of freeing slaves in the British Empire.

One of the largest gatherings took place on Monday, August 2, 1858. The main highlight was former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. People came from across the whole Hudson Valley. A formal procession from the AME Zion Church (then on Catharine Street) went to the dock to greet arriving guests at the Hudson River, and formed a procession to “College Grove,” on the west of College Hill at Clinton Street, where a platform had been raised for the speakers. Along with chairs, tables and non-alcoholic refreshment. *Representative photo, DCHS Collections.*



He said music was vital in the upkeep of moral of the troops, and relations with local civilians. He did not return from France until July 23, 1919, more than eight months after the end of fighting.

When he came back he was able to get a job as a bellhop, at the Windsor Hotel, discussed earlier. In a 1979 newspaper interview with the *Poughkeepsie Journal* he said, “We weren’t treated very fair when we came back. They were so prejudiced. Living later in life at 22 Montgomery Street, Gould died in 1982, age 89.

**Clarence Anderson** is shown, bottom right, in 1957 being sworn in as a County Court Officer by County Sheriff C. Fred Close. Anderson had just retired after 32 years at the Post Office. Close was a WWI veteran as well, and very active in veteran affairs. Even with his war service, his obvious strength of character and skill in the community, he did not escape discrimination. In 1941 he had ordered tickets to a play in Clinton for a group of friends. Upon arrival, although they could see the tickets pinned to a board behind the ticket agent, they were denied entry. A lawsuit followed which he lost. There are conflicting reports as to whether the loss was due to a procedural technicality, or whether it was due to the endorsement of the counterclaim that they were denied entry “for their own safety.”

The trail in pursuit of equality continues, while our trail ends.

